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FM AMEMBASSY ANTANANARIVO  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 0854  
INFO RUEHZO/AFRICAN UNION COLLECTIVE IMMEDIATE  
RUEHEE/ARAB LEAGUE COLLECTIVE IMMEDIATE  
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS IMMEDIATE 0953  
RHHMUNA/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI IMMEDIATE  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ANTANANARIVO 000025

SIPDIS

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ADDIS FOR AMBASSADOR COURVILLE  
DEPT FOR AF/E AND AF/FO  
PARIS FOR AFRICA WATCHER

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/14/2018

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SUBJECT: PRESIDENT SAMBI DETERMINED TO LIBERATE ANJOUAN

REF: ANTANANARIVO 004 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: AMBASSADOR R. NIELS MARQUARDT FOR REASONS 1.4B AND D

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Following Assistant Secretary Jendayi Frazer's first visit to the Union of the Comoros (septel), Ambassador Marquardt held a number of meetings with President Sambi, high-level Union Government officials, and members of the international community to discuss the possibility of a Union Army (also known as the Army of National Development, AND) landing to "liberate" the island of Anjouan from Colonel Mohamed Bacar. While Sambi, under pressure from the military and elsewhere, seems decided on military action and confident it will succeed, other officials expressed concern that the AND's lack of resources and manpower will lead to a debacle. The international community in Moroni continues to back the African Union's (AU) remediation efforts but lacks consensus on next steps, given their ineffectiveness to date. Bacar continues to consolidate his control over Anjouan in the face of imminent invasion, reportedly positioning his forces at the main hospital in hopes the civilian presence will deter AND forces from attacking; Bacar has also begun arresting his opponents, including President Sambi's cousin (septel). END SUMMARY.

PRESIDENT ALTERNATELY CONFIDENT, CONCERNED, AND RESIGNED

¶2. (SBU) In his January 10 meeting with the Ambassador (the day after meeting with A/S Frazer), President Sambi was determined that military action is the only way to "liberate" Anjouan. The AU's inability to enforce sanctions or to find a solution throughout nine months of negotiations convinced him the only option is to "impose" elections in Anjouan. While Sambi believes he has accepted humiliation throughout the AU negotiation process by agreeing to cater to Bacar's demands, in his opinion, Bacar has just toyed with the international community to buy time. Why consider another round of talks if AU Envoy Madeira already said in the September Cape Town Communique that all diplomatic means have been exhausted? Sambi insisted the AU is missing out on an opportunity to make a big name for itself by failing to resolve this relatively small problem. He asked, "Why is it the international community demands democracy but will not help us hold free and fair elections? I sometimes feel we are the victims of the politics of big nations."



13. (C) President Sambi,s tone alternated between bravado that an armed landing would succeed, concern of bloodshed if Bacar,s men resist, and resignation over having no other option. He assured the Ambassador the forces would be sent to provide security for the elections, not to retaliate against the Anjouanese. While he insisted Anjouanese residents will themselves blockade roads to stop Bacar from fleeing, he is also concerned that if the force is comprised only of AND soldiers, Bacar,s men will try to resist. Sambi would much prefer AU troops going in; he insists Bacar,s men would drop their weapons and flee. Sambi was confident the landing would succeed with only 300 to 400 (preferably AU, but if not, AND) soldiers. He estimated only 60 or 70 of Bacar,s men are loyal enough to fight back. Only 15 of those have military training; the rest are young men armed with Kalishnikovs.

14. (C) Sambi said the Union Army has enough arms but needs assistance with logistics and transport. With the AU hanging back, Sambi claims he has secured pledges of manpower and limited equipment through his own lobbying, although he was ambiguous whether these pledges still stand under a unilateral Union Army operation. According to Sambi, over the past several weeks the Senegalese President pledged 100 soldiers to join the AU force; the Libyans promised a plane (NFI); Sudan pledged soldiers; and the Tanzanian President offered the use of Tanzanian soldiers already present in the Comoros. The Arab League is also &ready to contribute,8 according to Sambi.

15. (SBU) President Sambi believes Bacar,s main interest in holding onto Anjouan is financial. Bacar,s wife resides in their home in France, where his bank accounts hold millions

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of dollars siphoned off from Anjouan,s port activities, the selling of offshore bank licenses and other illicit activities. If new island presidential elections were held on Anjouan, Sambi would accept Bacar,s candidacy as he is confident Bacar would lose. But with Bacar,s reputation with Comorans rapidly plummeting after increasing arrests/beatings of his opponents and retribution therefore lielly, Sambi believes he will need to leave the Comoros after the crisis is resolved for at least a few years if he hopes to survive.

16. (C) President Sambi reiterated his belief that officially, the French government is not supporting Bacar, but there are French citizens or &networks8 in Mayotte working with Bacar to traffic goods. He made clear in his meeting with President Sarkozy in September that this is unacceptable, and Sarkozy promised to &take the necessary measures.8 Sambi believes Bacar would back down if the French pressured him, but so far they have proved unwilling. He complained that although French Ambassador Job said the French have identified Bacar,s home in France, it seems neither his home nor financial assets have been touched. Sambi rejected French Ambassador Job,s suggestion the conflict over Anjouan was personal, saying he had always countered Bacar,s intransigence within the institutional framework, confident elections would sort the problem out until Bacar hijacked the process.

CHIEF OF THE ARMY READY FOR A FIGHT

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17. (SBU) In a separate meeting with the Ambassador later on January 10, AND Chief of Staff Salimou argued even more forcefully that waiting for an AU solution is useless. &Nobody wants a war, but no one will help us find another solution. If the President will listen to me, we will leave the AU as soon as Anjouan is back.8 At this point, &the greatest failure would be not to go to Anjouan,8 as the AND would then also look useless. &The Comoran people will understand if the effort fails ) but they will not understand if we continue to do nothing. After January 24, I



assure you things will not be the same.8

18. (C) Salimou was confident the operation will be successful. He estimated that of Bacar,s several hundred men, only 100 have professional military backgrounds and only 130 would be willing to die for him because Bacar is paying them off. There are approximately ten far-flung locations on Anjouan where the AND could conduct a maritime landing, and those loyal to Bacar can not protect every site adequately. Salimou insisted that two or three among those loyal 130 men are already calling him regularly with insider information, while others in Bacar,s army have called him to say they will run away when the invasion8 happens. Salimou explained the AND has secured a commercial boat called the Tresrajar (phonetic), belonging to a friend of the President, that can carry 200 people plus equipment. More than 10 Zodiacs will be placed on board the ships and used tactically to secure the LZ,s beforehand. The AND also has two speed boats, one of which is being repaired. He requested more equipment from the United States, including military boats and helicopters. Whether they get the equipment or not, he plans to move his soldiers to the Itsoundzu military training camp on Grande Comore this week, then move them to a staging area on the neighboring island of Moheli. He finished dramatically, &from there, we will go to Anjouan and dance in hell,s fire.8

19. (C) Salimou,s suspicion of the French, quite common in the Comoros, runs far deeper than President Sambi,s. He agreed Bacar would never win a free and fair election but believes there are networks in Mayotte supported by France preparing to get rid of Bacar and put someone else in power, essentially another warlord, whom they can control. Bacar is a prisoner of those &lobbies.8 Even under Sarkozy, &do you think France would invest in a separatist movement for ten years and just reverse their stance?8

VICE PRESIDENT SKEPTICAL

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110. (C) Smarting from a falling out with President Sambi over an unrelated corruption scandal, Vice President Idi Nadhoim told the Ambassador he feared an invasion of Anjouan will end in tragedy. He pointed out Bacar has 1,000 men in Anjouan, while the AND only has 300, half of whom are new recruits with less than one year of military experience. AND soldiers, salaries are six months in arrears, and all they are asking for in advance is a bonus ) which he dismissed as proof of their pack of professionalism or patriotism. As an elected member of the Cabinet, Nadhoim claims he is the only one daring to speak out, although others reportedly disagree with the President if asked.

INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY ON MORONI AMBIVALENT

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111. (C) Discussions with French Ambassador Christian Job, South African Ambassador Mabeta, UN Representative Opia Kumah and Japanese Ambassador Chichii Tadaharu revealed no real consensus in the international community in Moroni. Given historical sensitivities, France supports the AU,s efforts but refuses to get directly involved in a solution. Despite recently gaining information that the Union Government has secured two M-6 helicopters with Ukrainian pilots and boats from Tanzania, Job fears the AND invasion of Anjouan would result in significant deaths -- &or else this would be the first time in military history that an armed landing succeeded when the date was announced beforehand.8 He believes neither Sambi not Bacar wants to negotiate a political solution to their personal standoff (UN Representative Kumah disagreed), but acknowledges an AND invasion would be legitimate. France would only protest as a matter of form. He said Bacar would be accepted in France if he had to leave Anjouan, ala Ratsiraka. Kumah and Mabeta



added that both the UN (which has referred this entire issue to the AU) and South Africa stand behind the AU to find a solution. All seemed interested and supportive of potential U.S. involvement in helping the AU find a solution but resigned that an armed landing on Anjouan was imminent.

¶12. (C) COMMENT: With President Sambi publicly stating his intentions to take back Anjouan by force, Bacar is reportedly cracking down on Anjouan residents (septel). There is clearly a wide range of opinion and ample misinformation surrounding the logistics of an armed landing on Anjouan and the likelihood of success, but President Sambi's resolve is clear. Even with a successful liberation of Anjouan, there is little thought being given to what should or would happen in the aftermath. Sambi expressed concern about whether he can protect Bacar and his people from those seeking to settle old scores, while Salimou said preventing them from being harmed or killed is not my priority.<sup>8</sup> Sambi has agreed to wait until January 24 in the hopes U.S. involvement can help bring about a peaceful resolution of the problem. But the Ambassador's meetings in Moroni showed agreement really on only one question: &How can one person bring an entire government and country to its knees, just because he has some arms?<sup>8</sup> END COMMENT.

MARQUARDT

MARQUARDT